

# St. Clair Avenue Environmental Assessment

## Urban Design Discussion Paper



Working Document

March 2003

# 1.0 OVERVIEW OF CHARACTER AREAS



Between Gunns Rd. and Old Weston Rd. and Weston Rd., the character of the neighbourhood is more distinctly industrial. The intensity and fine grain of uses clearly diminishes. No islands exist: Streetcar shelters are on the sidewalk.

The area between Old Weston Rd. and Lansdowne Ave. includes the St. Clair Gardens Community, and the Joseph Piccininni Centre and Prospect Cemetery which unite this area with Corso Italia to the east. In this area, sidewalks have been widened, but the extra width is often unused. At intersections, there is only one off-track traffic lane in each direction.

The area roughly comprised between Lansdowne Ave. and Oakwood Ave. includes Corso Italia, a popular shopping and dining strip. On-street parking is available over much of the length of St. Clair Ave., except at intersections. In this area, the Business Improvement Association (BIA) has installed street furniture, lighting, banners, and other street furniture. Limited off-street parking exists, especially between Bathurst St. and Dufferin St.

Between Corso Italia and Hillcrest Village is a short strip centered around Oakwood Collegiate. To the east is Hillcrest Village, a diverse shopping and dining strip with its own BIA. Although it has a distinct flavour, Hillcrest Village is similar in form and function to Corso Italia. Just to the east of the Village, west of Bathurst, is another strip characterized by more car-oriented uses, including Midas and Speedy shops, fast food outlets and car dealerships. Unlike the area to the east, hydro poles here are older and more imposing.

The area between Bathurst Street and Avenue Road is essentially composed of low and mid-rise residential buildings. In close proximity to Bathurst St, a grocery store shares the northeast corner with a large gas station. The south side is mostly characterized by green space, including Winston Churchill Park and the ravine system. Tall trees can be seen throughout the area. Streetcar tracks form a ramp down to the subway station, thus creating a largely unused surface space.

This area is the densest of all, with many high-rises. Parking is in high demand, and conflicts arise between through traffic, parking and loading activities. Hydro poles are the most discreet in this section. Landscaping is left to individual buildings.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to initiate a discussion on the elements of Urban Design affected by potential changes to the transportation infrastructure on St. Clair Avenue between Yonge Street and Gunns Road. These elements include the transit infrastructure, landscaping, streetscaping, on-street parking, utility poles, gateway features and public art. This document will present a series of key observations regarding these elements and identify areas for intervention.

In this document, no assumption is made as to the scenario ultimately retained by the City and the TTC for transit infrastructure development along St. Clair Avenue.

## 3.0 TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE

Unlike other streetcar lines in Toronto, the St. Clair line has retained features designed to restrict or limit access onto streetcar tracks to private vehicles. Originally, the line was built with a reserved right-of-way, which was removed in the 1930s.

East of Old Weston Road, most streetcar stops at intersections on this line are located on islands, which are generally narrow and offer little protection to transit users.

Another notable piece of infrastructure is the ramps leading down to the St. Clair West subway station, which can be seen just West of Bathurst Street.

In general, while the transit infrastructure is functional, it is neither aesthetically pleasing nor friendly to transit users. Some is in need of repairs, for example railings, islands, and shelters



Example of island.



Ramp to tunnel at the St. Clair West subway station.



Shelter on the south side of St. Clair Ave. at Dufferin St.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPING

At major intersections, where streetcar islands are located, opportunities to widen sidewalks or the medians are limited. However, where St. Clair Avenue widens, opportunities exist for line painted areas of roadway, or landscaping interventions, either on sidewalks to enhance the pedestrian environment, or as a median to mitigate the width and straightness of the avenue.

In these areas, landscaping can also be used to break up a long series of on-street parking spaces, for example with a landscaped bumpout located at crosswalks.

A significant area for improvement is the space created on the surface by the streetcar tunnel in front of the Loblaws store just east of Bathurst Street. Currently, the surface created by the tunnel is inaccessible to vehicles and pedestrians, but is not enhanced in any way.

4

## 5.0 STREETSCAPING

As with landscaping, streetscaping can be used to create a more welcoming pedestrian environment and thus encourage strolling – *fare la passeggiata* – and window shopping. The various Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) on St. Clair West, including the Corso Italia BIA and Hillcrest Village BIA, have already installed benches, planters, banners and distinctive lighting as part of the strategy to enhance the appearance and welcoming nature of the street. These special efforts to strengthen BIAs identity should be enhanced. For example, where St. Clair Avenue widens, the sidewalk could be expanded in strategic areas and sidewalk cafés or clusters of benches provided. Non BIAs should also be enhanced through streetscaping improvements.

To signal to motorists to slow down and make pedestrians feel safer when crossing an intersection or walking to a streetcar island a



Leftover pavement area above the streetcar tunnel in front of the Loblaws store.



A bumpout can help interrupt the monotony of an uninterrupted column of parked cars and provide opportunities for enhanced tree planting.



Banner on Corso Italia.



Sidewalk dimensions, materials and furniture contribute to creating an attractive environment.



Example of bench and planter installed by the Hillcrest Village BIA.



Example of widened sidewalk at intersection in St. Clair Gardens.



Toronto Parking Authority lot by Arlington Ave. in Hillcrest Village.



Top: unused corner at St. Clair Ave. and Via Italia. Bottom: Toronto Parking Authority across Via Italia.

textured pavement material can be used.

In some areas, the sidewalk has already been widened, thus reducing the number of traffic lanes between the streetcar island and the sidewalk to just one. Left-turning and through traffic must then rely on the streetcar lane to proceed. If a reserved streetcar right-of-way were to be considered, such intersections will have to be reconfigured, to balance the needs of transit users, drivers and pedestrians.

## 6.0 ON-STREET PARKING

The regulations governing on-street parking vary widely over the length of St. Clair Avenue, and so does demand for parking facilities. In the areas closest to a large concentration of shops, residences and other uses, such as around Yonge Street, Bathurst Street and Dufferin Street, on-street parking is in high demand. For shoppers and visitors, it is the most convenient and desirable form of parking. For pedestrians, surface parking provides an additional benefit by forming a buffer between the sidewalk and fast-moving traffic.

5

Where proposed improvements to the transportation infrastructure may justify the elimination of some on-street parking spaces, replacement strategies could be explored in the form of small-scale surface or structured facilities beside or behind buildings – such as what exists at the southeast corner of Via Italia and St. Clair Avenue West. Structured or above-ground structured parking can also be integrated within new buildings.

If suitable landscaping and screening are implemented, surface parking lots would be acceptable as well, as long as they do not dominate the landscape and take away from the attractiveness of the street.

## 7.0 OFF-STREET PARKING SOLUTIONS

The following two adjacent examples, in Kensington Market and at Yonge St. between Charles St. and Hayden St. are facilities built and operated by the Toronto Parking Authority, with retail at grade and an architectural treatment sensitive to their surroundings.



*Kensington Market*



*Yonge St. between Charles and Hayden*

The example below shows the condition where setback and vegetation creatively screen the visual impact of surface parking lot.

6



*Montreal, Quebec*

## 7.0 ALTERNATIVES TO ON-STREET PARKING ON MAIN STREETS

### 7.3 Case study: integrating parking in a main street building

A bank branch located at the corner of Bayview Ave. and Millwood Rd. provides ten spaces to its customers on a deck located in the back of the building. An underground level contains twenty publicly accessible spaces operated by the Toronto Parking Authority (TPA).

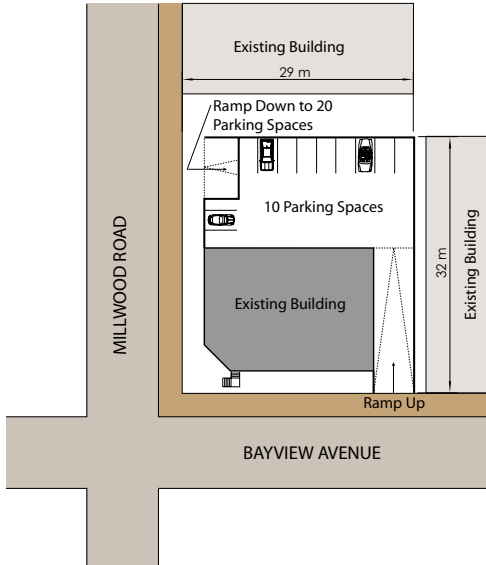
The building successfully addresses the need for localized parking facilities to serve local businesses - while maintaining the continuity of a consistent storefront street wall. It also represents an opportunity for the City to joint-venture in the development of new infill projects of a moderate scale, while addressing public parking needs. In instances where on-street parking is displaced, replacement parking in the form of these infill projects should be considered. The advantage of these smaller-scale prototypes may be the ability to be developed on existing, underutilized properties - especially at corner locations - without necessitating land assembly of multiple parcels.



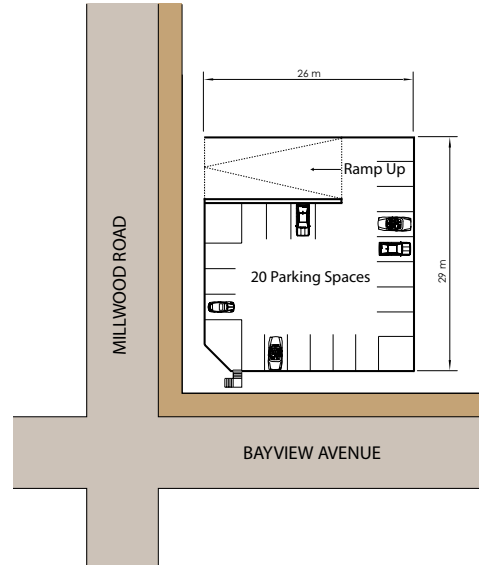
Corner of Bayview Ave. and Millwood Rd.

## 7.0 ALTERNATIVES TO ON-STREET PARKING ON MAIN STREETS

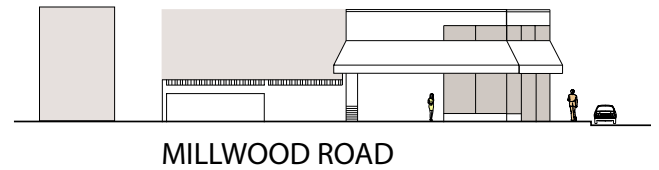
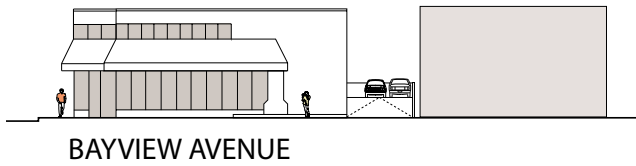
### 7.3 Case study at Bayview and Millwood (Cont'd)



First Floor Plan.



Underground Floor Plan.



Bayview Ave. side.



Millwood Rd. side.

Note: all dimensions are approximate.

## 8.0 UTILITY POLES

West of Avenue Road, and especially west of Bathurst Street, hydro poles are mostly large, wooden and antiquated. The sheer bulk, height and cluttered nature of this infrastructure is detrimental to the attractiveness of St. Clair Avenue. As part of this process, opportunities to bury these lines should be explored. In a scenario in which the streetcar would receive a reserved right-of-way, wires could be secured to poles located in the medians along the tracks, instead of spanning the entire street.

## 9.0 GATEWAY FEATURES AND PUBLIC ART

Each neighbourhood traversed by St. Clair Avenue has its own flavour, as described in Section 1.0 - Overview.

Public Art installations and Gateway Features help create a unique neighbourhood identity and foster community pride. *Our Future Together*, a report prepared by the St. Clair West Revitalization Committee, identifies the beautification of St. Clair West as a priority and recommends the creation of a Public Art Program.

To mark the entry to each distinctive area and within each neighbourhood or to each transit stop, modifications to the transportation infrastructure, streetscaping and landscaping could be accompanied by the installation of gateway features or public art reflecting the heritage and aspirations of the local residents. Public Art installations should be designed by artists in consultation with the local community.



Utility poles on St. Clair Ave. just east of Avenue Rd.



Utility poles on St. Clair Ave., just west of Dufferin St.



Public Art feature at Spadina Ave.

Public Art feature at Spadina Ave.